

Media arts: Arts education for a digital age

Peppler, K. (2010). Media arts: Arts education for a digital age. Teachers College Record, 112(8), 2118-2153.

Abstract:

The researcher draws upon over three years of extensive field study at a Computer Clubhouse (media arts studio) in south Los Angeles where underprivileged youth ranging in age from eight to 18 have access to programming environments utilizing graphic, music, and video production software. Using a mixed-methods design including interviews with young artists at the Clubhouse, video footage of Clubhouse youth in the process of art making, and an archive of youth media art projects, the researcher documents what youth learn through media arts making in informal settings. She also describes the implications for leveraging learning in a media arts context for learning in other academic content areas.

Key Findings:

Youth working in media arts learn and build upon key art concepts such as perspective, color, shape, and drawing from observation. The researcher observed youth making connections and learning about a wide variety of subjects, such as writing, science, and mathematics, while engaged in media art production.

Media arts have the potential to develop reading and writing skills for all youth, including those with cognitive disabilities. The researcher highlights a case in which a girl of limited capacity in basic literacy skills successfully completed a media arts project and began to take an active role in building basic reading and writing skills as a result of participating in the media arts project.

Students were deeply engaged in the learning process when practicing media arts at the Computer Clubhouse, suggesting that media arts present an alternative avenue for youth to learn aspects of media literacy, visual literacy, arts, technology, and subject areas such as mathematics and science.

Significance of the Findings:

The researcher points out that large school districts, including Los Angeles Unified (LAUSD), have recently recommended that media arts be included in the growth and development of arts education throughout the city. As districts and schools make these changes, it is important for researchers to contribute to an understanding of best practices and benefits of this type of learning for children and youth. This study contributes to these goals by closely examining marginalized youth at the Computer Clubhouse, who lack access to art education or new technologies in their schools.

Methodology:

The researcher used a mixed-methods approach to examining youth in the process of creating media art at a Computer Clubhouse in South Los Angeles, California, and drew upon over three years of ethnographic research on the media arts practices of urban youth. The young artists who are the subjects of this study range in age from eight to 18, but most are between the ages of ten and 14. All of the artists at the studio were black or Latino.

The researcher conducted interviews with young media artists at the Computer Clubhouse, and analyzed video footage of the youth in the process of art making and the youths' media arts projects. The researcher interviewed and surveyed four professional media artists who examined a random sample of the youth's projects to gather insights into the work produced by the youth and the potential benefits of work coming out of the Clubhouse. All data were analyzed by the researcher in three phases based on the research objectives.

Limitations of the Research:

This study's subjects are a relatively small sample of youth who visit the Computer Clubhouse and do so voluntarily. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to settings, such as schools, where participation is not voluntary and the atmosphere does not replicate that of the Clubhouse.

Questions to Guide New Research:

Research should be taken a step further through the establishment of an experimental study with randomized control and treatment groups to investigate the gains in literacy and arts skills identified in this case study.

Special attention should also be paid to media arts' impact on student learning outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities, as compared to other types of intervention used in special education.

The author suggests two areas for further exploration: 1) the other content areas (beyond literacy and the arts) with which youth might make connections in media arts work; and 2) the self-directed nature of much of the learning at the clubhouse. Do these learning behaviors set the stage for effective learning in other domains?

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